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INTERPRETING MISSILE DEFENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EUROPEAN REACTIONS

Jocelyn Mawdsley

From the end of the Cold War until 2009 discussions on nuclear politics within Europe were remarkably muted, given their history, and were largely reactions to successive US nuclear posture reviews in 1994, 2002 and 2010. Contentious debate was limited to national decisions on whether to allow elements of the US missile defence programmes to be sited on their territory. From 2009 to 2011 however, three decisions were made that have the potential for significant change in European nuclear politics. Firstly, the German CDU-FDP coalition government, elected in September 2009, agreed as part of their coalition agreement that they would enter into talks with their NATO allies and the US about the removal of US nuclear weapons from German territory. Secondly, in November 2010, Britain and France announced unprecedented bilateral cooperation on nuclear weapons testing facilities¹ signalling their commitment to their deterrents. Finally, also in November 2010, agreement between the NATO member states was reached on the acquisition of territorial missile defence capabilities at the Lisbon summit. These three announcements encapsulate a period of reassessment of nuclear politics in Britain, France and Germany, predominantly in response to the territorial missile defence issue raised by the USA, which has led to differing outcomes, and thus to an unusual level of tension on nuclear defence issues between France and Germany, which came close to preventing agreement in Lisbon and continues to fester (FRS 2011).

Missile defence has caused more disruption to the established nuclear politics in Europe than even the end of the Cold War did. It is therefore of interest because of what it reveals about the strength of nuclear traditions in Britain, France and Germany. This chapter starts from the premise that while much of the literature on nuclear politics in both the strategic studies and peace studies traditions has had a focus on either technical issues or strategic calculations, scholars have also correctly argued that nuclear weapons have a symbolic presence in domestic and international politics and culture beyond their supposed strategic importance². This chapter argues that nuclear weapons, be they in the form of independent nuclear deterrents (Britain and France) or US weapons sited on domestic territory (West Germany and Britain) can best be understood as representing a complex web of beliefs about the state, its existence and its role, which might not be discussed openly but underpinned initial choices on nuclear weapons. Alongside this representational quality of the weapons, the chapter will argue that narratives and practices (some contradictory), which can be understood as traditions, have developed around the supposed strategic rationale for nuclear weapons, their development and their place in wider defence policy. It also argues that an examination of the peculiarly closed nature of defence policy-making in each country shows how these traditions and the underpinning representational nature of the weapons are sustained by suppressing dissent and mediating challenges or dilemmas.

The chapter will start by unpacking the concepts used in the analysis and then will look at the construction of nuclear beliefs and traditions in Britain, France and Germany. It will then briefly explain why missile defence as a concept has the power to disrupt this and then re-examine the three states to see how they have reconstructed nuclear weapons narratives to deal with this dilemma.

SYMBOLISM, TRADITION, NARRATIVE AND SOCIALISATION IN DOMESTIC NUCLEAR POLITICS

Let us start with the relatively uncontested point that national security is more than just a label – it is a powerful political symbol even in times of comparative peace (Baldwin 1996). The status of nuclear weapons as the ultimate weapon to be deployed in the cause of national security lends them almost inevitably a stature of particular importance beyond their strategic use. However, their acquisition, for those interested in looking beyond the nominal strategic rationale, is often associated with national prestige and existential questions of national identity. As Sagan (1996-7: 74) has argued ‘military organizations and their weapons can therefore be envisioned as serving functions similar to those of flags, airlines, and Olympic teams; they are part of what modern states believe they have to possess to be legitimate, modern states’. But nuclear weapons are also a powerful portrayal of national insecurity and the emotions associated with this. This chapter argues therefore that nuclear weapons, be they in the form of independent nuclear deterrents (Britain and France) or US weapons sited on domestic territory (West Germany and Britain) can best be understood as what Edelman (1985: 6) described as condensation symbols, which ‘evoke emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness...’. In other words, they function as representations of webs of beliefs about the state, its security dilemmas, its past military glories and humiliations and its sense of its place in the world.

The continued presence of nuclear weapons also encapsulates the essence of the domestic political negotiation and compromise involved in the initial decision to accept them as a crucial part of defence. Moreover, the supporting lobby coalition remains almost inevitably

‘locked in’ to the continuing development and reaffirmation of the nuclear choice as further decisions become necessary. Their different motivations, justifications, practice and ideas around the nuclear question, over time, can perhaps best be understood as nuclear traditions. Traditions might be usefully thought of as ‘a set of understandings someone receives during socialisation’ (Bevir, Rhodes and Weller 2003: 11). Nuclear traditions therefore might be understood as inherited beliefs (sometimes contradictory) about security institutions, strategic history and practice. As Berger suggests assimilation and socialisation into these traditions takes place, ‘they [cultures] are transmitted through the often imperfect mechanisms of primary and secondary socialisation and are under pressure from both external developments and internal contradictions.’ (Berger 1996: 326) Looking at attitudes through the prism of tradition does not necessarily rule out change though:

Although tradition is unavoidable, it is so as a starting point, not as something that governs later performances. We should be cautious, therefore, of representing tradition as an unavoidable presence in everything people do in case we leave too slight a role for agency. In particular, we should not imply that tradition is constitutive of the beliefs people later come to hold or the actions they then perform. Instead, we should see tradition mainly as a first influence on people. The content of the tradition will appear in their later actions only if their agency has led them not to change it, where every part of it is in principle open to change.(Bevir, Rhodes and Weller 2003: 11)

This chapter wishes to argue however, that the strategic traditions or rationales that have developed to rationalize nuclear policy are particularly change resistant, precisely because they have been largely shielded from internal and often external criticism. It takes therefore a fundamental challenge, in this case missile defence, to force reconsideration.

The chapter also argues that the stability of nuclear traditions (with the partial exception of Germany) is partly due to the way in which nuclear politics are made by small elite groupings, and party politics have not traditionally played a major role. As Frey has argued their power can be almost absolute:

Frequently, the common interest of these actors leads to the formation of a coalition, a 'strategic elite', which seeks administrative as well as communicative power by controlling public opinion. By controlling public opinion, the strategic elite is able to create a positive public disposition towards nuclear weapons by building up threat perceptions, and, more significantly, by attaching symbolic values to nuclear devices: national pride, collective dignity, or their negative counter-values such as collective defiance and insult. (Frey 2006: 14)

This links back to the powerful representational nature of nuclear weapons and shows how the beliefs, traditions, narratives and elite nature of nuclear politics can be mutually reinforcing.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NUCLEAR POLITICS IN BRITAIN, FRANCE AND (WEST) GERMANY

British beliefs

In 1952, Britain became the third country in the world to test an independently developed nuclear weapon. Although British scientists had made important contributions to the Manhattan Project, in 1946 the Americans passed the McMahon Act severing the British and American nuclear weapons programmes. This was seen as a major snub and a blow to the

British self-image of being a major global power. The importance of tradition and historical thinking in the formulation of British external policies is noticeable. For Hill, for example, in Britain, “‘historical thinking’ in the sense of attitudes, which are rooted in images of the country and its interests as they were in preceding generations has been particularly marked’ (1988: 27). In many ways the British nuclear deterrent is rooted in just such a vision of continuing global power. The initial commitment to gain an atomic bomb certainly did not involve particular strategic calculations but rather was seen as necessary for the preservation of global standing. As Bevin famously put it;

I don't want any other foreign secretary of this country to be talked to or at by a secretary of state in the United States as I have just had in my discussions with Mr Byrnes. We've got to have this thing [a nuclear bomb] over here whatever it costs. We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it. (Bevin cited in Phythian 2007: 29)

Even in the official history of British nuclear weapons, Arnold (2001) argues that the 1954 decision to move to develop thermonuclear devices was primarily rationalized by fears of losing global standing and influence with the USA, rather than the potential need to contribute to the NATO nuclear deterrent.

It was Duncan Sandys' 1957 Defence White Paper that solidified the position of the nuclear deterrent in British defence policy. The White Paper recognized that Britain's role as a global policeman east of Suez was no longer affordable, made massive cuts in conventional armed forces, including the ending of conscription, and crucially decided that the nuclear deterrent

was the way Britain could replace the ensuing hole in its defences. Although the 1958 UK-USA Mutual Defence Agreement rapidly changed Britain's nuclear deterrent from independent to interdependent and then dependent on the USA by the end of the 1960s, the symbolism of the nuclear deterrent for British politicians remained the maintenance of great power status (Freedman 1999). For Alec Douglas-Home for example, the bomb was a ticket of admission giving Britain 'a place at the peace talks as of right' (Pierre 1972: 178). In general, British postwar defence policy has been a matter of compromise or as Carver described it tightrope walking:

Why tightrope walking? Because British defence policy is a perpetual balancing act: between commitments and resources; between Europe and the wider world; between Europe and the Commonwealth; between links with Western Europe and North America; between in simplified terms, a continental and a maritime strategy. (Carver, 1992: vii-viii)

Nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War were viewed as Britain's best insurance policy given it could not afford to challenge the USSR's conventional armed strength. Unlike France, little patriotic symbolism was attached to the bomb and few outrageous claims were made about its military value (Freedman 1999). It represented simply the cheapest way to maintain international status in defence terms, even if by the 1980s, the spiralling costs had a negative impact on British conventional defences.

British strategic narratives and traditions

From the 1957 White Paper onwards, British strategic narratives have had to disguise some fairly basic contradictions in its nuclear strategy. As Deweerdt (1963) argued, Britain was opposed to nuclear proliferation but contributed to it in three ways: firstly, by insisting on its separate nuclear deterrent; secondly, by acknowledging the indivisibility of the Western deterrent but insisted that its own weapons remained independent; and thirdly, by recognizing that Britain could not be defended from Soviet nuclear attack but proposed to meet a major Soviet ground attack in Europe with early, and if necessary, full use of nuclear weapons. Freedman (1999) suggests that British nuclear doctrine from the 1960s onwards was consistently based on a theory about multiple decision centres. The official argument was that while Britain had complete confidence in the US guarantee, it recognized that adversaries might be less impressed. A second centre of nuclear decision-making (i.e. the UK), particularly as it was closer to the likely conflict area, would add extra uncertainty to the adversary's calculations. Underlying this, as Freedman (1999) points out, there was a private justification of insurance in case the US withdrew its guarantee, but the official rationale, despite not standing up to critical analysis, persisted, because ministers could avoid critical debate easily, as few in Britain were interested in challenging the purported strategic rationale for an independent nuclear deterrent. Similarly as Freedman (1981) argues the narrative of independence was left mainly unchallenged, despite it being obvious that Britain was dependent on the USA for delivery vehicles from the 1960s onwards, after the cancellation of the Blue Streak programme.

A crucial explanation for how British politicians and officials were able to cling onto contradictory strategic narratives about the nuclear deterrent was the closed nature of defence policy-making. Freedman points out that;

It is not unusual in Britain to ignore the wider context in discussions of nuclear policy, because the formulation of the policy itself has normally been held highly within the executive branch. This has tended to encourage rationales that reflect the interests of senior officials and ministers in the exercise of international influence and in the virtues of continuity for its own sake. (Freedman 1999: 134)

Both main political parties also supported the lack of disclosure and critical debate because it prevented political embarrassment vis-à-vis their doubts about the USA nuclear guarantee. For the Labour party, which had many supporters of nuclear disarmament in its ranks and in opposition tended to be critical of the nuclear deterrent³, the lack of debate also enabled it to largely avoid criticism that while in government, Labour tended to follow the same pro-nuclear policies as the Conservatives (Freedman 1989). Moreover, as Arnold (2001) points out in the official history the decision to develop a thermonuclear weapon met with little dissent either in the House of Commons or in the press then or thereafter. Even though Britain was the site of large scale and well-organized protests by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in both the 1960s and 1980s, popular protest never really interrupted the closed circle of nuclear policy-making.

French beliefs

France was the fourth state to develop and successfully test an independent nuclear weapon in 1960. Diplomatic tensions with the USA post-Suez and discomfort at the development of the British nuclear deterrent have been suggested as reasons for the French decision (Schwarz 1991). However, the key decisions were taken following de Gaulle's return to power in the midst of the May 1958 crisis. It is this crisis that needs to be understood to see how the

nuclear deterrent became such a powerful political symbol in France underpinning the web of beliefs about what constituted France under the Fifth Republic. The May 1958 crisis came about when the French army declared that it had lost confidence in the Fourth Republic and had taken responsibility for the future destiny of French Algeria itself. It was in short a military coup. The army successfully insisted that de Gaulle be called upon to lead a national unity government. De Gaulle's return to power led to the establishment of the Fifth Republic with its strong presidential powers and to the stabilisation of France. For French politicians therefore

...the successful stabilisation of the state under the Fifth Republic – and the complex intergenerational process of 'legitimation' which was initiated in its first decade – has resulted in the sacralisation of the nuclear deterrent as the tangible symbol of national unity, democratic consensus, political efficacy and a significant and independent role for France on the world stage. (Cerny, 1984: 62)

The deterrent was a linking mechanism for the revival of the state, as it helped harness military reorganisation to high-tech *dirigisme* across the state economy. As Hecht (1998) points out, the French policy-making elite based their recovery from this post-World War II identity crisis, with its anxieties about their wartime losses, American dominance, decolonisation and the demands of reconstruction, by fostering visions of a new technological France, based on industrial development and engineering prowess.

The nuclear deterrent also solved various longstanding disagreements over defence policy between the political left and the right. From the French Revolution onwards the left had favoured mass conscription as the only way for the citizen to defend the state, whereas the right favoured a professional army. The role of the army in the French Fourth Republic remained problematic, as the repeated coup attempts in Algeria showed, but the new nuclear role for the armed forces reintegrated them into the state, while keeping nuclear weapons under strict civilian control and so both removed a serious source of potential instability and consolidated presidential authority (Cerny 1984). There was cross-party political support for the deterrent and this enabled a degree of national unity on defence during the Cold War even when there was little agreement elsewhere. Moreover, as Chilton and Howorth argued in the 1980s:

The bomb has come to appear, in popular political culture, as one potential answer to France's perennial problems. Nuclear weapons avoid overdependence on allies, without excluding the value of Alliance membership. They can be seen as a form of geographic fortification, an atomic Maginot line, which 'sanctuarizes' French territory at very little cost. The weapons have always been seen as 'war-preventing', and that, for a nation which has suffered constant defeat since 1815, also means 'defeat-preventing'. (Howorth and Chilton, 1984: 12)

The belief that possession of nuclear weapons turned the French state into a sanctuary also ties into a powerful element of the nuclear web of beliefs namely, strategic independence. A constant in French security politics is that, even prior to de Gaulle, and the development of Gaullism in foreign and security policy, France's search for grandeur on the world stage required autonomous military strategy and armed forces that were under national control (Kolodziej 1987).

French Strategic Narratives and Traditions

The key elements of French nuclear strategy were developed predominantly by two Generals, Ailleret and Gallois, between 1958 and 1968. The first element was '*dissuasion du faible au fort*' namely the belief that the equalising power of the nuclear bomb meant that a smaller weaker state could effectively dissuade a larger and stronger state. The second element was proportionality or the idea of graduated deterrence. This meant that the potential damage caused to the strong by the weak through a nuclear attack, had to outweigh an adversary's potential gains in a conflict. Thirdly, France did not have the resources for a flexible response and so had to remain committed to massive retaliation. Finally, the French argued that you could not know who in twenty years might be an adversary, so their weapons were not targeted at any state in particular but instead were '*tous azimuts*' – aimed at all points of the compass. Just as in the British case, this doctrine did not stand up to critical interrogation. As Freedman (1981) pointed out there were three major problems; firstly that France helped create greater international instability by leaving the NATO integrated military command; secondly, that although the claim was '*tous azimuts*' the reality was that France only had the resources for a regional not a global deterrent and; thirdly, it was never clear how France intended to reconcile its NATO obligations with the idea of France as a rather aloof nuclear 'sanctuary'. Similarly, in leaving the NATO integrated command France lost influence over NATO nuclear weapons deployments and disarmament talks, as there were no longer any US weapons on French territory. A final objection might be that the claims of independence proved to be rather overstated, as France received covert nuclear weapons assistance from the USA, which continued throughout the Cold War (Ullman 1989).

To trace the development of French nuclear narratives, it is also important to look at the *livre blancs* or White Books on defence policy during and after the Cold War to see the continuity of policy. The 1972 *Livre Blanc* rejected the NATO stance of flexible response in favour of strictly national deterrence to preserve French vital interests, because of their belief that nuclear risks could not be shared and effectively put nuclear deterrence at the heart of French defence (Ministère de la Défense 1972). The 1994 *Livre Blanc* was primarily about postCold War force projection, but continued to justify the role of nuclear weapons for some threat scenarios, along much the same lines. Nuclear strategy remained broadly the same in both documents. Between 1994 and 2006 there were some adaptations to French nuclear doctrine: a decoupling of deterrence and conventional action; a reduction in the size of French nuclear forces leading to their reorganisation; the acceptance that the nuclear deterrent has to enable France to protect its vital interests in future against regional powers possessing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons; and the 1998 ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (Tertrais 2000). But it was not until 2006 when Chirac announced an extension in the role of French nuclear weapons to new mission areas (such as being used against terrorist attack) and towards more flexible nuclear forces, and revived an idea from 1995 of a concerted European nuclear deterrent that major changes to French nuclear strategic narratives were made (Butler 2006). This length of time testifies to the strength and rigidity of the original doctrine and the difficulties in making changes.

The stability in French nuclear narratives was also partially produced by a closed system of defence policy-making around the president. Defence policy-making in France is centred on the *corps* of administrators and officers with the addition of some academics, who have

enjoyed a similar training in one of the elite schools such as ENA or *École Polytechnique*. These schools as well as offering advanced administrative or technical training also teach their students to serve the state and their training has a unifying effect on the students (Kempin and Mawdsley 2006). Successive presidents have surrounded themselves with representatives from these networks and as Treacher (2003) points out, even the Ministry of Defence itself has not played a large role in the formulation of strategic defence policy. Nuclear weapons have cross-party unconditional political support and so there is no real sense of intellectual challenge to existing nuclear doctrines. Even the French peace movement traditionally concentrates on protesting about American security policy and is rarely seen to attack the French nuclear deterrent (Chilton and Howorth 1984).

West German beliefs

For West Germany just as in France and Britain, nuclear weapons carried a symbolic value but it was not one of independence but rather one of reluctant dependence. There are two contradictory elements to this. Firstly, and most obviously, West Germany had a strong domestic anti-militarist tendency in the aftermath of World War II. Directly after the Second World War Germany was disarmed, and it was not until 1954 with the signing of the Paris Treaties, and West Germany's 1955 accession to NATO, that a West German army was formed, because NATO needed more troops to mount an adequate conventional defence against the Warsaw Pact states. This was a measure that was difficult for other West European countries who had suffered earlier German aggression, most notably for France. Rearmament was also domestically unpopular with many industrial leaders fearing that it would divert resources from the economic recovery. Efforts were made to avoid any taint of militarism in the new forces: in contrast to traditional models of civil-military relations such as those in Britain, France or the United States, the primacy of politics, or civilian rule, was made an integral part of the setting up of armed forces in the Federal Republic, along with

extensive measures to ensure that the armed forces were integrated into wider society. However, nothing could disguise the reality that West German citizens were on the probable front line of any East-West conflict and that, despite the addition of West German forces, NATO was conventionally outnumbered and so reliant on the US nuclear deterrent for a credible defence. The 1955 Exercise Carte Blanche, which assumed the detonation of 355 nuclear weapons on French and German soil, calculated that 1.7 million people would die immediately and 3.5 million would be seriously injured. This was widely reported in the West German press. This crystallized the West German nuclear dilemma: dependent on the US nuclear deterrent for its security against conventional attack but acutely vulnerable in the event of a nuclear war (Kamp 1995).

Secondly, nuclear weapons came symbolically to represent West Germany's dependence on the USA and to serve as a humiliating reminder that it was not a fully sovereign state. From 1953 onwards some of the US's nuclear weapons were based on West German soil. As part of the negotiations on joining NATO however, a commitment was made in 1954 that West Germany would not produce atomic, biological or chemical weapons on its territory (Kamp 1995), however despite this commitment to non-production, possession of nuclear weapons was not ruled out by some politicians. In 1957 Adenauer horrified the general public, scientists and the Social Democrats by appearing to suggest that German troops should have 'small' nuclear weapons (Schwarz 1991: 266-9). He had hoped that France, West Germany and Italy could use Euratom to develop a nuclear weapons programme, but de Gaulle blocked this idea when he returned to power in 1958. Although the US had repeatedly assured both the Soviet Union and nervous NATO allies that West Germany would never become a nuclear weapons power,⁴ in fact the picture was less clear cut from a US perspective. The question of West German nuclear participation was raised again in 1963 with an American

proposal for a multinational NATO fleet armed with Polaris nuclear missiles. The West Germans were enthusiastic seeing the proposal as an opportunity to gain more say over NATO nuclear strategy, but their European allies were much less keen on the prospect of West Germany entering the nuclear club by the back door, even though the US had proposed the MLF precisely to stop West Germany demanding its own nuclear posture (Kamp 1995). The final West German acceptance of non-nuclear status came as late as 1969, after parts of the West German political elite campaigned hard but ultimately unsuccessfully against the signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which they argued confined Germany forever to the inferior status of a nuclear 'have-not'. Nuclear weapons therefore were symbolic of a web of beliefs comprising West German dependence on the USA, its inferior status within NATO and having to accept NATO strategic doctrines that left West Germany vulnerable to nuclear war, in order to have its territorial security ensured against conventional attack.

West German Strategic Narratives and Traditions

The Federal Republic of Germany's nuclear policy-making confined itself to modest forms of nuclear involvement, namely the possession by the Bundeswehr of nuclear-weapons-capable carriers which, following a decision on use by NATO and the American president, would deliver American warheads, and participation in the decision-making about doctrine, target-setting, and procurement within the framework of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, established in 1967 (Kelleher 1975). However, West Germany was often made to feel uncertain about the extent of the US guarantee of West European security. As Garaud (1985) points out, during the years of détente the Kennedy administration took measures designed to contain the risks to US grounds in defence of their European allies; there were proposals to

limit numbers of US ground forces in Europe, and statesmen like Kennan and McNamara urged that the US repudiate nuclear first use on Europe's behalf. For West Germany there was a general sense, until President Reagan came to office, that NATO defences were no longer credible. This highlighted the West German nuclear dilemma in ever starker terms.

Perhaps the best example of the strategic ambivalence that successive West German administrations had to manage was the 1979 double track decision, and the subsequent intermediate nuclear forces disarmament negotiations. The decision to link deployments of U.S. long-range theatre nuclear forces (LRTNF) to proposals for negotiations with Moscow over those and Soviet forces – with the caveat that if these failed the missiles would be deployed four years later – was in part an American response to German fears over Soviet deployments of SS-20s and Backfire bombers and the need to offer them reassurance over the continuation of the US guarantee. West Germany agreed to host modernized Pershing II ballistic missiles and cruise missiles (Zadra 1990). Despite considerable reservations about the utility of these weapons and massive demonstrations against the decision, the Bundestag voted for their deployment in 1983. Proceeding with the decision to deploy Pershing and Cruise missiles in West Germany, given the opposition, was politically brave, but also shows how the West German political elite had bought into the absolute necessity of the nuclear deterrent. They were then almost immediately pushed into disarmament negotiations, which forced West Germany to agree to compromises that undermined precisely the rationale the politicians had agreed on in deploying the weapons (Zadra 1990). It was impossible for West German politicians to construct a comforting strategic rationale for their nuclear weapons decisions like Britain and France had; rather they had to live with dependence on a USA that seemed at times capricious and the knowledge that despite the risk being greatest for West Germany, it was not able to make truly sovereign decisions on security.

West Germany always struggled to reconcile a powerful anti-militarist sentiment in civil society, and indeed its own political elite's preference for a normalisation of relations with Eastern Europe, with its unwavering support for US nuclear weapons being sited in West Germany to ensure its security. The West German politicians were always aware that there were enough nuclear weapons stationed in Europe to destroy it many times over, and that their policies on deterrence were at odds with much of public opinion. The Pershing and Cruise missile deployment above all led to years of demonstrations against the weapons attracting up to 1 million people (Zadra 1990). Just as in France and Britain, these decisions were taken by a relatively small group of politicians, who could then generally rely on the Bundestag to vote in favour, because the fear of isolation from its NATO allies was still a major motivating factor for West German politicians of the Cold War era. What was different in West Germany is that throughout the Cold War there was a constant critical debate about security policy, both in society at large and amongst the political elite. This coupled with the fact that the Bundestag had much more power on security matters than either the French or British parliaments, meant that insofar that German politicians and officials were socialized into acceptance of nuclear deterrence, it was in the open knowledge that the situation was a far from desirable one.

MISSILE DEFENCE AS A NUCLEAR POLITICS DILEMMA

US missile defence plans have made successive generations of British, French and German politicians uneasy. Ballistic missile defence had long been seen as a potential destabilising

development in the Cold War, and it was to prevent this that the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was signed by the US and USSR in 1972. It limited both sides to first two, and then after 1974, one site for a strategic defence system. The agreement aimed to protect the nuclear balance by ensuring that neither side could limit the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons, by reducing the damage of a nuclear strike to politically or militarily acceptable levels. US President Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), which aimed to use ground and space-based systems to protect the USA from attack from ballistic nuclear missiles, was viewed therefore with concern by Europeans. As Garaud (1985) points out the concerns for the West Europeans at that time were that, if the USA and USSR were able to establish defensive systems, this would simultaneously undermine the British and French deterrents, as the concept of the weak deterring the strong would be unworkable, and Western Europe would find itself no longer protected by deterrence, and so would be more vulnerable to both conventional attacks and short-range nuclear weapons that were difficult to intercept.

Even after the end of the Cold War the US decision to pursue a national missile defence (NMD) programme, which led to them withdrawing from the ABM Treaty in 2002, posed a general security dilemma for the Europeans. Firstly, the security aspects of the collapse of what was regarded as a cornerstone of arms control treaties were worrying – would the entire arms control structure disintegrate? Secondly, would it prompt Russia to return to a nuclear arms race rather than continuing on the economic reform path favoured by the Europeans? It also posed specific national questions for the three countries. For Britain,

Formulating a policy on this issue impacts on several key areas of foreign and defence policy, some of which are in conflict with each other, some of which go to the heart of Britain's understanding of its international role and some of which

compel the government to make choices it would perhaps prefer to put off. (Smith, 2005: 447)

Smith (2005) suggested that it posed various questions for Britain. Firstly, the US radar base at Fylingdales was crucial for US plans and so there was a decision to be made on whether to allow its use. Given that British government has always regarded nuclear matters as Anglo-American in nature, a refusal was never likely. Secondly, it posed a quandary of balancing traditional transatlanticism with a growing European sensibility (particularly given British opinions on NMD were closer to European ones than American ones) and with defence industrial interests. Thirdly, just as SDI had, NMD challenged Britain's self-understanding as a nuclear power.

For France too immediate reactions were about its own understanding of itself as a nuclear power. France's negative reactions were twofold. Firstly, it felt that NMD undermined the deterrence concept and thus threatened France's own nuclear posture, and secondly, there was great scepticism about whether NMD was technically feasible (Kempin and Mawdsley 2005). Moreover, they did not entirely share the extent of the US threat assessment on ballistic missiles even though it was agreed there was a potential threat (Lellouche et al. 2000). However, scepticism needed to be balanced by the acceptance that this technology could prove vital for the politically important French defence industrial base (Kempin and Mawdsley 2005).

For Germany, NMD also posed a difficult challenge. Firstly, the Germans were reluctant to take a clear national stance on the issue, particularly if it was against the USA, and so tried to

move the discussion to NATO (with British support). Secondly, it was an issue on which the political parties were split – the CDU was broadly in favour of NMD while the SPD and the Greens were opposed, claiming it would start a new arms race. Missile defence was also a difficult issue for Germany as, while like both Britain and France, politicians from all sides tended to believe that the American threat assessment was exaggerated, they felt obliged to support the extension of missile defence to Europe because peripheral NATO members were within the range of existing ballistic weapons, and Germany was thus reminded of its own difficult Cold War position (Bitter 2007).

RECONSTRUCTING THE NUCLEAR NARRATIVES

Although NMD was not initially particularly welcomed by any of the three states, it has now been accepted. All three are in favour of NATO developing territorial missile defence capabilities to protect Europe. This does not mean that they entirely accept US threat assessments or that they are convinced that the technology will be completely feasible, but as the worries about the destabilising effects of the end of the ABM treaty have lessened, acceptance of MD as a legitimate defence strategy for NATO have grown, particularly as the NATO moves include some cooperation with Russia on the issue. But what does this mean for national nuclear traditions after the first real challenge of the post Cold War era?

For both Britain and France, the main strategy for dealing with the dilemma of NMD was to incorporate it into their own existing nuclear traditions. For France the enabling mechanism was the importance of a high-tech defence industrial base to underpin its nuclear deterrent (Kempin and Mawdsley 2005). Their 2009-13 military programming law earmarked an increasing amount of procurement money for missile defence-related projects. France appears

to have made the calculation that unless it makes a meaningful contribution to the NATO plan, it will lose military status and risk the strategic autonomy that the nuclear deterrent was intended to provide in the first place. In July 2011 the French Senate committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Armed Forces argued that while the actual risk of a missile reaching France was small, France risks being outdistanced by the USA on missile technology, if it did not take a leading role in the NATO project (de Selding 2011). For the British, the NATO decision allows it to continue balancing Atlanticism and Europeanism without conflict. Like France, it too has defence industrial ambitions in the area and still considers possession of nuclear weapons to contribute to its global power. While the recent debate on the replacement of Trident saw more criticism than usual of the rationale for the British nuclear deterrent, the supporting coalition remained intact. Similarly, in France although a 2012 book by former defence minister, Paul Quilès, questioning the purpose of French nuclear weapons caused some debate, in January 2013 President Hollande reaffirmed the state's commitment to nuclear weapons, even at a time when large defence budget cuts were needed in France (Quilès 2012; Keaten 2013). For both states, nuclear weapons remain a symbol of national status and strength. The main ongoing problem for both the British and the French is continuing to fund their extensive defence ambitions. The decision to begin bilateral cooperation on nuclear weapons is taken against this backdrop. While the independence of each deterrent was emphasized in the 2010 Teutates agreement, this cooperation offers both states a chance to maintain their national nuclear narratives and cut costs.

Germany, on the other hand, has abandoned its national nuclear traditions in response to the dilemma of missile defence. For the last decade Germany has been increasingly involved in calls for complete nuclear disarmament, something that is hard to reconcile with the continued existence of US nuclear weapons on German soil. Initially this was a campaign led

by peace activists, but calls for the removal of these weapons have now become government policy and are supported by all parties (if only rather half-heartedly by the CDU) (Mättig 2008). This change of policy represents a major shift in opinion among the political elite from the keen cross-party support for nuclear weapons during the Cold War. For the Germans, the supporting coalition in favour of nuclear weapons has disintegrated in direct contrast to the situation in Britain and France. For the French at least, this call for disarmament is closely linked to German support for missile defence as they view NMD as negating the need to have nuclear deterrence. This has led to an unusual level of friction between the two states, usually regarded as close allies. As de Durand bluntly argued:

This translates again for the French side into fundamental differences with Germany on defence issues. The Germans have chosen missile defence in NATO, and have been the most tedious on the issue of nuclear deterrence... For Germany today, there are no real security problems, as it gets along well with Russia at the moment. (FRS 2011: 11)

Why has Germany reacted so differently to France and Britain, when the core of its defence policy had been based for so many years on maintaining nuclear deterrence? It would seem that British and French nuclear beliefs and traditions are based on positive emotions; prestige, status, autonomy, stability; and this made them more resilient and adaptable in the face of the missile defence dilemma. Germany on the other hand associated its nuclear beliefs and traditions with negative emotions; dependence, uncertainty, danger and inferiority, so making it much easier to take a completely new path. Similarly, while the nuclear support coalitions remain largely intact and insulated from criticism in Britain and France, in Germany it has

dispersed and the underlying critical pacifist critique of the nuclear deterrent has been given free rein, resulting in policy change.

The chapter argued that nuclear weapons represented a complex web of beliefs about each state, its existence and its role at the time that the original decisions on nuclear weapons were made. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the rupture in German politics caused by reunification and the gaining of full sovereignty after the end of the Cold War has meant that those initial choices now seem less valid than in France or Britain – states which have not gone through the same degree of political change. Similarly, while the narratives and practices developed to justify nuclear weapons policy, defined as nuclear traditions in this chapter, do not stand up to critical scrutiny in any of the three states, it is only in Germany where the insulated nature of nuclear policy-making has been successfully challenged. While at first glance, the divergence in contemporary nuclear weapons policy choices between Britain and France on the one hand, and Germany on the other hand, might seem puzzling, an interpretive approach casts light on why this might be the case. The dilemma posed by missile defence forced the policy actors in the three states to reconsider their national nuclear traditions. For British and French policy-makers, despite some criticism, these traditions were sufficiently convincing not to require major change, for Germany the reverse was true.

¹ In a groundbreaking treaty, which was drawn up in close consultation with the USA, they have agreed to work closely together on the simulated testing of the performance of their nuclear warheads and associated materials. To that end, British experts will be able to access a French research centre in Valduc, where virtual testing of the viability and safety of the warheads can be carried out. Moreover, a new joint technology and development centre based at Aldermaston will develop radiographic and diagnostic technology to support hydrodynamic testing of nuclear weapons (Kempin, Mawdsley and Steinicke 2010).

² For a full discussion of this point see, among others, Chilton (1985) or Buzan and Herring (1998: chapter 11).

³ In 1960, and again in 1982, the Labour party conference voted in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

⁴ Interestingly, contrary to US assurances on this point to the USSR the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of the US Congress discovered by accident on a 1960 visit to a NATO airbase that German-manned fighter bombers equipped with nuclear warheads with no discernible US control (Steinbrunner 1974).

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